

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

A U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE IN A POST-UNIFIED KOREA: IS IT REQUIRED?

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ABSTRACT

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In a future geo-political environment where North and South Korea are unified under a single government with single economic and military systems, how will this shift in the strategic environment impact U.S. diplomacy, the U.S. National Security Strategy, and the balance of power in the region? Will U.S. vital interests in the region remain unchanged and if not, how will they change? In the past, U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS) prominently stated that a "strong and stable Asia Pacific community was one of six top strategic priorities." The current NSS states, "...North Korea has become the world's principal purveyor of ballistic missiles, and has tested increasingly capable missiles while developing its own WMD arsenal." During his 2002 State of the Union Address, President Bush labeled North Korea as part of the "axis of evil." Undoubtedly, the Korean peninsula is one of the likely major regional conflicts or theaters of war. Major military reviews of U.S. military requirements and force structure this decade have factored in North Korea as a major conventional and unconventional threat to U.S. vital interests in the region. A change to this major regional threat will alter the strategic environment of Asia Pacific region and have significant implications for the U.S. Armed Forces.

A U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE IN A POST-UNIFIED KOREA: IS IT REQUIRED?

The purpose of this paper is to explore varying perspectives on the Northeast Asia security environment as it relates to the future of the Korean peninsula. Because of our historical ties to Korea, South Korea's emergence as a viable democratic economic power and the instability of North Korea, a wealth of information is available from a variety of sources on both Koreas. North and South Korea hold significant interest not only for the U.S., but for other major countries of the world as well. So there's a significant body of literature on the politics, international relations, economies, defense forces, security, and threats of both Koreas written from a variety of international perspectives. After researching, considering, comparing, contrasting, and applying critical analysis, the goal is to arrive at an independent conclusion regarding U.S. military presence in a post-unified Korea by answering the thesis of this monograph: should the U.S. Armed Forces remain on the peninsula in a post-unified Korea? If a presence is required what would be the size and composition of the force, or more importantly, what military capabilities must the U.S. maintain in the region?

Introduction

"Land of the Morning Calm" - that is the official state motto Korea uses to describe its country. Yet the uncertain and often tense strategic environment on the Korean peninsula is anything but calm. Often volatile and precarious, the situation there captures the attention of political and military leaders, analysts, and media organizations around the world. This concern and attention is certainly warranted considering the 120 mile demilitarized zone (DMZ) between North and South Korea is the most heavily armed border in the world. It remains one of the last bastions of the Cold War era. The isolated hard-line communist regime of Kim Jong-Il has an active force of over 1.2 million North Koreans under arms staring down its democratic neighbor in the south. A massive armor and artillery capability are posed in attack positions within 40 miles of the DMZ.¹

In addition to their impressive conventional capability, North Korea possesses a huge special operations force, weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and an ever increasing capability to deliver these weapons. North Korea represents a serious military threat to the region and U.S. political and military leaders take this threat seriously. Stalinist North Korea and its totalitarian government are an economic disaster and blight on the region. Pyongyang's record on human rights is also atrocious. The government has allowed millions of North Koreans to literally starve to death while they continue to funnel scarce resources to their armed forces. They sponsor state terrorism and are heavily involved in organized crime to help

generate badly needed hard currency. As if that isn't enough, in April 2003 North Korea announced it has nuclear weapons and expressed a willingness to export nuclear material and related technology.² This not only violates international accords, but serves to destabilize the region, and represents a global proliferation threat.

In his 2002 National Security Strategy and in other public forums, President Bush has identified weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in the hands of our enemies as the gravest threat to America's security.³ The U.S. is committed to countering the threat and promoting stability in the region by maintaining resolve and a military presence. Roughly 77,000 U.S. military personnel are stationed in the region - 30,000 on the Korean peninsula - the remaining 47,000 are stationed in Japan with additional forces apportioned to the theater.⁴

Yet in spite of the current grim and unpredictable situation on the peninsula, many analysts and political leaders hold out hope for a "calm" Korea - a unified Korea. Though unification has been a long held ideal, especially among the Korea people, political and economic circumstances have increased possibility of reunification. As conditions continue to deteriorate in North Korea, it isn't a matter of "if", but how and when implosion will occur. After all, who at the beginning of the last decade would have predicted the sudden and relatively peaceful collapse of the Soviet Union or reunification of Germany? Generating much of the discussion on Korean reunification is the desperate political and economic situation in North Korea. Extremely isolated from the world, North Korea has suffered erosion in its relations with old communist allies to the north, Russia and China. Neither wants a nuclear arms race in the region nor the specter of a serious armed conflict involving WMD. Both are currently preoccupied with their own economic and political affairs and are growing weary of the financial drain North Korean creates.⁵

North Korea has become both an enigma and an albatross within the international community - eerie and strange to most and difficult to engage in constructive diplomacy. Poor agricultural practices combined with several years of adverse and devastating weather conditions has caused widespread famine conditions, disease, and starvation. Extremely militaristic, the North Korean army consumes more than one fourth of the state's gross national product leaving significantly less per capita for the remainder of the population.⁶ Domestic production has plummeted and the four modest years of GDP growth (1999 – 2002) were preceded by a decade economic decline.⁷ The most recent modest growth is attributed largely to huge food and oil assistance from the World Food Program and foreign countries. Virtually every economic indicator reveals a general downward spiral and forebodes of eventual disaster.

To date, the extreme conditions in the North have not resulted in animosity towards President Kim Jong-Il and the Communist North Korean regime. But this condition can not persist indefinitely and signs of disenchantment are growing. A rash of defections over the last decade within the military, diplomats, and even members of Kim Jong-Il's family portends of increased dissatisfaction with the internal state of affairs in North Korea. Nearly 2,000 North Koreans defected in 2004 alone, a huge number and an increase over the previous year.⁸ The most significant and celebrated defection was Hwang Chang-yop in February 1997. Hwang was a top trusted party official in Kim Jong-Il's cabinet and credited as the architect of "juche" the self-reliance ideology of North Korean.⁹ His defection represented a serious blow to the communist North with some claiming it was akin to Thomas Jefferson defecting from the United States of America.¹⁰ Given the significant and severe structural difficulties, it is surprising the regime has survived this long.

The larger question concerning a North Korean collapse is how will it occur? The fall of the Soviet Union and subsequent reunification of Germany might serve as an example. However, most political and military analysts believe some form of conflict is inevitable during a collapse of North Korea. Estimates of how the north will collapse range from a full-scale military invasion of the South as an act of desperation with the possible use of WMD to a relatively quiet coup of the current Kim regime. U.S. and South Korean military officials view the conventional full-scale invasion scenario as being increasingly less likely.¹¹ Certainly North Korea has the means to launch a destructive assault across the DMZ, but is limited in its ability to sustain such an effort. Pyongyang would gain little or no support from the international community for such a foray. In an armed conflict they stand to lose much including the destruction of their military, their country, and power. Instead, they seem content to impose hardships on the populace and reluctantly receive assistance from outside when the situation grows desperate.

The most likely scenario is that implosion will result in an internal struggle, perhaps escalating to a civil war. Since Korea borders China and Russia, they are unlikely to allow a struggle to persist without calling for some form of response. At some point, the international community will intervene, perhaps empowered by a United Nations (UN) mandate, and a future for North Korea will be negotiated. South Korea, with a democratic government and market economy seventy-eight times that of North Korea's, is positioned to offer the North some economic concessions.¹² South Korea would likely require some international assistance to fund the estimated \$250 billion in the first ten years, and \$840 billion total to rebuild the decadent infrastructure in the North.¹³ Under UN supervision, North and South Korea could reach a consensus on a democratic form of government for a unified Korea. Korean

nationalism is the strongest unifying force, overshadowing any allegiance to existing forms of government. The anticipated end state is reunification with minimal opposition or interference from other nations in the region and broad support from the international community.

“Predicting how a state will fall is an inexact science. Many would like to put a time line on it - that’s frivolous.”

- General John Tilelli, Former Commander, U.S. Forces Korea -

No one can predict with certainty exactly how reunification will occur. But it is important to recognize that both how and when North Korea collapses will impact and shape subsequent events.

However, it is not within the intent or scope of this paper to examine the dissolution of the current communist regime of North Korea in great depth. In order to keep this research focused and of an acceptable length, some reasonable assumptions must be made about reunification. This widely postulated, yet plausible "peaceful reunification" scenario where armed conflict doesn't extend beyond North Korea's border, serves as a point of departure for further discussion. Building on this assumption, section two of the paper goes on to explore possible changes in the strategic environment as a result of unification, balance of military power issues in the region, collective security arrangements, bilateral and multilateral relations. The paper concludes with a discussion and analysis of these pertinent issues and culminates in answering the thesis of this monograph: should the U.S. military forces remain on the peninsula in a post-unified Korea? If a presence is required what would be the size and composition of the force, or more importantly, what military capabilities must the U.S. maintain in the region?

Analysis of the Asia Pacific Security Environment

“North Korea alive brought the great powers together to prevent proliferation and war. North Korea dead will drive them apart in unpredictable and potentially conflicting directions.”

- Paul Bracken, Professor of Political Science, Yale University -

Reunification of the Korean peninsula is certain to prompt changes in the strategic environment. Whether these changes bring stability and increased prosperity to the region or result in disaster largely depends on how the U.S. and major regional actors respond to events surrounding reunification. Also, the timing and suddenness of events will, to some degree, shape responses.

Any meaningful discussion of U.S.-Korean relations in a post unified environment must first begin with a larger consideration of the major regional actors, their colorful histories, and their complex interrelationships. China, Japan, and to a lesser degree, Russia's response to a unified Korea will impact the strategic landscape and must be considered in the geo-political calculus.

China

"The United States relationship with China is an important part of our strategy to promote a stable, peaceful, and prosperous Asia-Pacific region.

- The National Security Strategy ¹⁴ -

Historically, China's role as a major regional actor and international player is derived from its sheer size, long history, and immense population. One of the oldest and most populous world civilizations, China was prominent among the Asian countries until the rise of Japan in the 19th century¹⁵. Today China is a major economic and growing military power and must be reckoned with in terms of both regional hegemony and its ability to challenge the U.S. globally. China already wields considerable political, economic and military power. They are a permanent member of the UN Security Council, have the fastest growing economy in the world and a large military force with strategic nuclear capability¹⁶. China's position, perhaps more than any other country, will impact the outcome and aftermath of North Korea's collapse.

Currently China is in a transitional period, employing a strange blend of Marxism and capitalism, pursuing economic rather than political reform. This unique mix presents a foreign policy challenge for the U.S. Are U.S. interests best served by containing the growing military threat from one of the largest remaining communist countries? Or should the U.S. exploit the opportunity presented by China's economic reforms, and engage them economically in the hopes that political reforms will follow? At present, U.S. policy towards China is "a constructive relationship...cooperating well where interests overlap, including the war on terrorism and in promoting stability on the Korean peninsula."¹⁷ The "constructive relationship" includes trade with China, a World Trade Organization (WTO) member with most favored nation trading status resulting in a \$30 - 40 billion a year trade deficit for the U.S.¹⁸ Unfair trade practices, human rights violations, Taiwan's independence, proliferation of missile technology, and double digit defense spending have been tolerated, while the U.S. attempts to soften the communist government through engagement favorable to China. Time will tell whether this strategy proves to be a wise and productive policy that truly promotes stability in the region.

This much is certain, while the U.S. improves relations with China through a strategy of cooperation, China will increasingly demand the rightful status and treatment as a world power. A greater role for China has been frequently repeated by Chinese officials. China most recently demonstrated this insistence by hosting in the six party negotiations over North Korea's nuclear program.¹⁹ China's role was to persuade North Korea to return to the negotiation table in an attempt to persuade them to dismantle their nuclear program. Though China's rising stature may be cause for concern, China still has a way to go to contend militarily as a superpower. Their military, though growing rapidly, still lacks the capability to rival the U.S., a condition expected to persist into the early decades of the 21st century.²⁰ Further, China does not have a history of pursuing expansionist policies. As China demonstrated during the Korean War, it will use force when its sovereignty or territory is threatened, but China doesn't occupy. Instead, China strikes and then withdraws without occupying.²¹

However, not all agree with this assessment. Paul Dibbs from the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies at the Australian National University Strategic and Defence Studies Centre argues that, "China is becoming more assertive, seeking a more dominant role, and likely to use force in order to obtain regional hegemony."²² Certainly a case can be made for a "rising China", as they have an increasing influence in both regional and international affairs. But to date, China's aggression has been limited to those well publicized long-standing territorial claims like Taiwan and the Spratly Islands.

China's declared priority at present is economic growth.²³ More cordial and strengthened trade relations with the U.S., Japan, and South Korea are vitally important to achieving China's economic goal. The U.S. has embarked on a strategy that accommodates China's economic goal. Similarly, trade between China, Japan and South Korea has increased. China will continue to act in a manner consistent with their economic policy which will seek further interdependence with Western economies and avoid conflict that would be disruptive. As China become more prosperous and closely connected economically to other nations, particularly South Korea, it will be less likely to risk hostilities that threaten regional stability and continued economic growth.

Sino-Korean Relations

The Korean peninsula is strategically important to China. Historically, China and Korea have a shared heritage and deep cultural ties. Since the Cold War through the present, the 880 mile shared border with the DPRK serves as buffer against South Korea, the U.S., and Japan.²⁴ Although China has no actual territorial claim to the peninsula, Korea will increase in importance

as China continues to expand economically. The current trend in Sino-Korean relations has been a cooling in diplomacy and trade between China and North Korea while relations with South Korea have warmed.²⁵ Recently Chinese President Hu Jintao told the South Korean parliament that relations between the two countries was "entering their best period ever" and China supports eventual reunification.²⁶ Improved U.S. - Sino relations have helped, but this trend stems largely from a very practical outgrowth of China's current policy to pursue economic reform and growth. China is rich in natural resources and labor, but needs technology and investment capital. Conversely, South Korea has technology and developed industries, but needs raw materials, cheap labor and a local foreign market for expansion and trade. China has tried to avoid the hard economic lesson of the Soviet Union and has looked to South Korea as a model of economic success. China normalized diplomatic relations with the Republic of Korea (ROK) in 1992 much to the chagrin of North Korea.²⁷ The ROK has been extremely helpful to China's economic interests, while the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) continues to appeal for additional aid. If the current trend continues, South Korea will far exceed the north in its strategic and economic importance to China.

Russian-Korea Relations

Soviet influence on the peninsula since WORLD WAR II has been enormous. Soviet occupation north of the 38th parallel, dictated the Marxist-Stalin Communist political and economic system of North Korea. The organization, doctrine, and equipment of its military and its relations with the international community are patterned after the old Soviet model.

Like China, a divided Korea served the Soviets well during the Cold War. The North provided a buffer between the U.S. and Japan and counter balanced Western influence in the region.²⁸ Subsequent events have impaired relations between Russia and North Korea. First, Russia established normal diplomatic relations with South Korea in 1990 which angered North Korea.²⁹ Second, the severity of Russia's economic collapse cut off economic and military assistance to North Korea and prompted a dramatic reduction in aid and a demand for hard currency on all military hardware sales. These changes to Russia's diplomatic and economic policies have greatly diminished its influence over North Korea. Neither economic nor military cooperation between the two are close. During the latest crisis sparked by North Korea's announcement of to restart its nuclear program, one Russian expert noted that Moscow lacked the means to influence or sway Pyongyang.³⁰

Yet in spite of deteriorated relations, Russia has sought opportunities to improve the situation and views balanced relations with both Koreas as being in its best interests. Likewise

North Korea sees Russia as its only hope for balancing power in the region, faced with a U.S. supported South Korea and Japan on one side, and an increasingly cool China on the other. Certainly Russia has compelling strategic interests in Korean's future both economic and political and won't accept a nuclear Korea.³¹ Also, they would like to preclude either Japanese or Chinese hegemony. Russia badly needs the influx of South Korea's investment capital, technology and economic aid. North Korea shares its borders and could serve as base for military aggression against Russia. The entire peninsula borders the Tsushima Straits, strategic sea lanes in the Sea of Japan. Russia would rather avoid conflict on the peninsula and nuclear tension, because it threatens their security and adds further turmoil to their existing domestic woes. While Russia played the role of mediator during the 1994 Agreed Framework, they had a much less active role in the more recent, ongoing six party talks.

Ultimately, Russia's future relations with two Koreas and their response to reunification will be shaped in terms of maximizing their own national interests. In this context, analysts present two opposing views of Russia's position on reunification. Some believe that a neutral and democratic Korea would stabilize the Asia Pacific region by filling the power vacuum created by Russia's own decline.³² Ideally, Russia would like a unified Korea that is favorable to their interests and precludes either Japanese or China dominance. On the other hand, some Russians oppose reunification and would rather maintain the status quo. U.S. military presence in South Korea and Japan is a known entity and provides stability in maintaining the balance of power. They see Korean unification as an enormous financial burden on South Korea which could detract from the expanding trade and economic assistance Russia presently enjoys.³³ Further, a strong unified Korea may lead to Japan's remilitarization and worse nuclear armament. Historically, there is a great deal of animosity between Russia and Japan, and currently an ongoing dispute over the Kurile Islands. Russia would like to see both China and Japan kept in check.

In my opinion, Russia is too weak to greatly influence Korea's destiny. Saddled with serious structural problems, Russia's ability to prevent North Korea's collapse is nonexistent. Russia's future is linked to its flagging economy. As it seeks to strengthen ties with South Korea, its economic security is increasingly dependent on a stable, secure Korea. When crisis occurs in North Korea, the Russians will want to resolve it quickly to minimize the disruption and impact to their own country. If reunification is the fastest and least painful path to peace, Russia will not oppose it. They will strive to stay engaged in regional affairs, primarily to optimize their own interests. Thus it will be left to the U.S., China, Japan, South Korea, and the UN to resolve the North Korean issue.

Japan-Korea Relations

Historically relations between Koreans and Japanese have been strained. Embittered by the forceful and mostly brutal occupation by Imperial Japan earlier this century, Korean/Japanese relations are still tainted. Wary of the Japanese, some South Koreans are concerned how long the U.S.-Japan alliance will last given rising anti-U.S. sentiment regarding U.S. troops stationed there.³⁴ Accordingly, it is perceived that reductions in U.S. troops stationed in Japan will lead to a reciprocal increase in the Japanese military. Some measures have already been taken to reduce U.S. military presence in Okinawa based on recommendations by the Special Action Committee on Okinawa (SACO).³⁵

The remilitarization of Japan would be unacceptable to Korea as well as Russia and China and would create instability in the region. So it is no surprise that most South Korean's see Japan as the most significant regional threat over the next two decades.³⁶ Similarly, Japan would be skeptical of a unified Korea, with a large conventional force and a nuclear capability. A nationalistic Korea with strong anti-Japanese sentiments backed by the power of a united military and economy would certainly promote uneasiness in Japan. This alone could incite Japan to expand its military capabilities. Past missile launches by North Korea towards Japan into the East Sea has served to stir hawks in Japan's military and government.³⁷

Nevertheless, in spite of historical animosities and lingering mutual suspicions, relations between the Koreas and Japan are somewhat improved. Japan is a key player in the six party talks and was to provide the technology and expertise to build the light water nuclear reactors for North Korea in accordance with the Geneva Agreement Framework. North Korea has normalized diplomatic relations with Japan with the goal of obtaining badly needed economic assistance and cooperation. Japan is an economic giant both in Asia and the world. However, Japan, like most countries, is hesitant to make substantial investments in North Korea because of their grossly inefficient markets and general instability. By contrast, trade between Japan and South Korea is flourishing. Upon reunification, Japan is likely to pursue more aggressive economic cooperation with a stable, democratic Korea than it currently has with the north.

U.S.-Korean Relations

South Korea's future has been closely bonded to the U.S. since World War II. Officially the U.S. remains committed to security on the peninsula and demonstrates that resolve through a variety of means. The U.S. has engaged North Korea on efforts to dismantle its nuclear ambitions thereby reducing tensions on the peninsula while affirming its alliance to South Korea

and the Mutual Security Treaty of 1953. Accordingly, the U.S. maintains a military presence of roughly 75,000 personnel in the region - 30,000 on the Korean peninsula.³⁸

While the U.S. remains committed to Korea, there exists some serious challenges to U.S.-Korean relations. First, U.S. attempts to selectively engage North Korea tend to erode relations with the ROK. An example of this was manifest during the six party talks. Ideally, the North Koreans would like the U.S. to sign their proposed 1974 bilateral peace treaty which would replace the 1953 UN Armistice and then another pact ending U.S. sanctions. Both proposals exclude South Korea as a participant. Recently North Korea refused to continue the six party talks unless the U.S. first addresses the economic sanctions currently imposed.

A second factor that could adversely impact the future stationing of U.S. troops in Korea is rising nationalism. Nationalism in South Korea is increasing especially among the youth, and along with a corresponding anti-American sentiment. A recent RAND study poll found that young, educated South Koreans see the U.S. as a greater threat than North Korea.³⁹ A similar occurrence in Okinawa has put pressure on U.S. and Japanese officials. While some demonstrate against American "imperialist presence" others protest the adverse moral influence. Several outright vicious crimes have been committed against the indigenous population by U.S. troops. Officially the South Korean government remains committed to the U.S.-ROK Mutual Defense Treaty of 1953 and supports continued U.S. presence. A combination of forces are at work to undermine this resolve. Reunification eliminates a major threat on the peninsula. With a combined military force of 1.8 million active and 10.5 million reservist (North/South), it is doubtful Korea would require allied forces in light of the reduced threat.⁴⁰

Other driving forces for reduced U.S. presence are environmental issues and economics. Urbanization has bought business and residences right up to the exterior wall of U.S. bases. Living in such close proximity, residents soon grow weary of the noise and disruptions of military training. Some of these bases are located on prime real estate that is eyed enviously by those dwelling in the suffocating urban sprawl. In heavily populated Seoul, a chunk of land used for recreation by U.S. forces was released back to the government to build a family park. Under a Land Partnership plan signed in 2002, U.S. Forces Korea will move all troops south of Seoul by 2007, reduce the number of bases from 41 to 23, and return nearly 135 million square meters to South Korea.⁴¹ Economics are a major consideration in the U.S. as well. Privately U.S. officials concede that growing anti-American sentiment in combination with increased budgetary pressure is eroding support in Congress. Congress continues to look for ways to increase "burden sharing" among allies and to reduce the military footprint by emphasizing continental

United States (CONUS) based power projection and expeditionary forces. Faced with the reality that projected defense budgets won't support the desired level of forces, some tough decisions need to be made. One analyst's view is that forces may be reduced overseas not only because of technology, but because the U.S. will rely more on the capabilities of allies ⁴².

Multilateral Security in the Asia Pacific Region

More significant than the bilateral relations between the major actors in the East Asian region is the interplay of multilateral relations. The most important and perhaps complex dynamic influencing the region is the relationship between U.S., China, and Japan. As noted analyst Jonathan Pollack stated, "the central set of relationships likely to define Northeast Asian security and stability will be the longer dynamics between Japan and China, and how the United States interacts with both."⁴³ Russia is a declining power and plays a more limited role in shaping the East Asian security environment. While the relational interplay between these nations is often complex, the important roles of the U.S. and China are obvious. During this century China has greatly influenced and shaped North Korea, as the U.S. has South Korea. As a superpower, the U.S. possesses military dominance, while China is an emerging economic and military power. Perhaps less obvious is the integral role of Japan. Historical animosities and competing strategic objectives between China and Japan made bilateral relations between the two slow and painful. It is widely believed that any power vacuum in East Asia created by a weaker Russia and reduced U.S. presence will be filled by China or Japan.⁴⁴ It is important that the US mediates and balances the interest of both particularly with respect to a unified Korea. Fortunately relations between China and Japan have improved recently as China pursues its economic interests and strengthens ties with Japan. Increasingly the region is being shaped by economics and the U.S., Japan, and China are the three largest economies in the world. The key to cooperation and regional stability rests in shaping events that are perceived as mutually beneficial to these three powers. All three recognize the strategic importance of the Korean peninsula and its significance to the regional balance of power. All three, to some degree, will pursue strategies and policies that advance their own national interests.

Without a doubt, Northeast Asia's regional security continues to be shaped by the triangular relations between the U.S., China, and Japan. Even so, South Korea, the likely inheritor of the peninsula, plays a significant a role in posturing a unified Korea. South Korea must continue to strengthen its bilateral ties with China and Japan. By building on the growing economic cooperation and trade, South Korea will achieve a strategic importance that eclipses any communist loyalties China may have with the North. South Korea also needs to strengthen

its multilateral relations and collective security arrangements. A good step in that direction occurred when South Korea sought and obtain admission to the United Nation's Security Council as a non-permanent member and joined the World Trade Organization in 1995.⁴⁵ Admission to the UNSC and WTO provides the ROK with increased visibility and a voice in the international community which will be important in straightening relations and shaping its future.

South Korea should also seek greater stature in regional forums like the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP). ARF membership includes the larger nations of Asia Pacific and its primary objective is to promote confidence building measure and engage in preventative diplomacy for resolving regional conflict.⁴⁶ CSCAP is a collective security organization similar to ARF, but with a larger membership, to include the European Union, which focuses more on regional security issues.⁴⁷ To South Korea's credit, they have taken several initiatives and were an early advocate of a collective security apparatus in East Asia. However, they lacked clout and stature at the time. Now they need to reassert themselves using these recently established forums as a platform.

Findings, Recommendations, and Concluding Analysis - Continued U.S. Military Presence in Korea?

Though the historical, cultural, economic, military, and geo-political circumstances mentioned are important and central to this analysis, the timing of events is also very important. As Russia remains in a condition of atrophy and China has yet to achieve superpower status, events will likely unfold differently than say 20 years from now. The strength of emerging actors and an individual nation's ability to react to events, current international relations, proliferation issues, and a host of other variables all converge to shape events and outcomes. This concluding analysis flows from the discussion above and assumes events will be shaped within this context.

In some respects, events precipitated by the reunification of Korea are likely to emulate events that followed the destruction of the Berlin Wall and collapse of the Soviet Union. After reunification, the very purpose for the U.S. led United Nations Command - to deter North Korean aggression and to administer and enforce the 1953 armistice - dissipates. The public at large will perceive that the threat is vanquished and peace has emerged victorious. Appeals for a "peace dividend" will soon follow and pressure will mount to reduce U.S. presence in Korea. In Korea, nationalists, the anti-American forces, and those sympathetic to North Korea will pressure their government to remove the U.S. military presence. The Korean government will be strapped economically to integrate the two countries. As a result enormous pressure will arise to severely reduce military spending in light of the absence of a clear and present threat.

Korea will resolve to maintain friendly relations with the U.S. to include military cooperation. They may seek to revise the U.S.-ROK Mutual Defense Treaty of 1953 to allow for generous port calls and continued combined military training exercises, but also a withdraw of U.S. forces permanently stationed there.

China will pressure Korea, the UN, and the U.S. to remove U.S. forces from Korea. While China is not strong enough, nor would they desire to directly challenge the U.S., they are capable of wielding significant political pressure. In 1950, China was very clear that they did not want U.S. troops on its borders when they entered the Korean War. Historically, China is not expansionist, but protectionist and will most likely leverage this opportunity (reunification) to rid the peninsula of foreign military presence. China also desires a role commensurate with its economic and military status and a weakened U.S. position will strengthen China's. China will use the continued U.S. presence in Japan to check Japanese remilitarization and mitigate Japan's power in the region. Eventually China will use their increased stature to pursue territorial and sovereignty claims against Taiwan and the Spratly Islands and shore up their own security interests.

The U.S. will continue to maintain vital interests in the region and retain a credible military presence to protect them. U.S. vital interests in the Asia Pacific region include increased foreign trade, a key component to continued U.S. prosperity. Currently, U.S. trade with Asia far exceeds trade with Europe representing thirty percent of all U.S. exports and millions of domestic jobs.⁴⁸ The U.S. will continue to honor treaty obligations with Korea and Japan and seek to maintain open navigation and security of the strategic sea lanes in the region. Maintaining alliances and remaining engaged in the region is important to a successful nonproliferation strategy. Failure to successfully mediate the current North Korean nuclear crisis and maintain a balance of power in the region may result in South Korea and Japan pursuing WMD.

However, the U.S. can continue to prepare and shape the Asian strategic environment without a permanent military presence in Korea. First, the U.S. has a range of strategic options and can employ other instruments of power to effectively engage the region. The U.S. can pursue diplomatic initiatives to normalize relations with China, and strengthen bilateral and multilateral relations among the regional actors. The challenge for U.S. foreign policy is to maintain a critical balance between competing interests among the regional powers in East Asia. The U.S. already provides stability to the region and is well positioned for this role. Strong ties to both Japan and South Korea and improved relations with China and Russia logically casts the U.S. in a mediating role. As the world leader in information, technology, and

advanced medical procedures, the U.S. has the most leverage with China and other countries in the region. The U.S. can employ its economic strength to increase trade and mutual prosperity which will eventually lead to economic interdependence and greater cooperation in the region.

Finally, it is entirely possible to withdraw the permanent U.S. military forces from Korea without withdrawing from the region. U.S. presence in Japan and Okinawa, in addition to the presence of U.S. carriers in the East and Yellow Seas, will demonstrate a sustained U.S. military commitment to the region. U.S. ship visits to ports throughout Korea will show the flag and U.S. resolve in regional security. Christopher Yung of the Korean Institute for Defense Analyses recently observed, "Korea ranked in seventh in the region for Seventh Fleet port visits."⁴⁹ Increased port calls and combined training exercises is an effective means to advance U.S. interests in the region without the baggage of a permanent presence or intrusion upon the sovereign territory of another nation. Of the 75,000 troops stationed in the region, 30,000 are in Korea. The bulk of ground combat power in South Korea comes from the 680,000 man ROK Army. U.S. ground forces consists of two (to be reduced to one) brigade of mechanized infantry, and an Army headquarters with its supporting units.⁵⁰ The relative combat power of U.S. ground forces in Korea vis-à-vis DPRK forces is minimal. Their presence largely represents a commitment to the bilateral treaty with the ROK and the UN Armistice. From a defense perspective, the need for continued U.S. forces presence after reunification is questionable. If Congress doesn't dissolve them due to increased budgetary pressures and emphasis on burden sharing, they can be relocated to Hawaii, Guam, or Alaska. Prepositioned sets of brigade size equipment can ensure ready response to the peninsula in the event of crisis.

Of greater significance is U.S. air forces on the peninsula. Currently, two wings occupying two separate air bases in South Korea represents a significant counterbalance to a sudden North Korean attack. While the air wings provide the U.S. with a great capability to counter the current threat, it is doubtful they will remain there after unification. It is possible to relocate additional air assets to Japan. Japan has factions that oppose U.S. military presence, though the greatest opposition is in Okinawa. The Japanese mainland is the most suitable location for relocating the wings. Other options include Guam, Thailand, and Hawaii or reliance on increased USN carrier presence to provide airpower as required. Again, cooperative defense exercises will permit U.S. air forces to periodically conduct flight operations out of bases on the Korean peninsula to maintain a visible presence once withdrawn. Given the flexibility, range, and firepower of U.S. airpower, it is more important to maintain the wings as opposed to ground forces in the region.

The rate and extent of withdrawing U.S. forces from the Korean peninsula is itself a delicate undertaking and has the potential to create instability and undermine U.S. national security objectives. Care must be taken to coordinate the withdrawal by heavily exercising diplomatic channels of communication to ensure U.S. actions and intentions are not misunderstood by either allies or potential regional aggressors. Ideally, the U.S. would pursue a gradual approach to withdrawal. This would allow the U.S. to gage the response of regional actors, thoroughly assess and reassess dynamics in the security environment, while retaining maximum flexibility to reverse the withdraw should the need arise. Certainly redeploying personnel, their property, and equipment, and closing facilities will take some time. Depending on the terms negotiated with the Korean government, complete withdraw could take considerable time to "restore" U.S. installations to an acceptable environmental standard. This was the case during retrograde operation during the draw-down in Europe and base closures in the U.S. However, environmental clean up need not involve U.S. combat troops, and in most cases, could be contracted. It is conceivable that the 8th U.S. Army consisting of a mechanized division headquarters, two mechanized infantry brigades, an aviation brigade, an artillery brigade, an engineer brigade, a military police brigade, a Patriot battalion, and a theater support command, could begin withdrawing six months after the reunification assuming the environment is deemed stable. Based on experiences of the U.S. retrograde in Europe, withdrawal of these units would take one and a half to two years. It is reasonable to assume that the ground forces would be the first to withdraw based on reasons previously cited. Also, most of the U.S. Army installations, with the exception of Yongsan Garrison, are used exclusively by U.S. forces whereas the air bases are co-operated bases and would likely service the ROK Air Force even after the U.S. departed.

The relocation of ground forces to Japan is not likely. First it would be a hard sell to Japan given the ongoing difficulties with U.S. ground forces in Okinawa. Second, it could send the wrong signal to Korea who remains wary of Japanese intentions. Third, the U.S. Congress and public will likely clamour to "bring the troops home." Guam remains a possibility, but it doesn't satisfy the third objection. Other possibilities exist, but the important point is that the U.S. retains the capability to rapidly respond to a crisis. Prepositioning brigade sets of equipment, either on the peninsula or immediately off shore, provides this capability. This approach reinforces stated U.S. interests in Korea, serves as a deterrence, provides a timely response, and satisfies objections to the continued presence of U.S. ground troops.

After two years and upon completion of the U.S. ground troop withdrawal, the U.S. Air Force wings could be withdrawn from the peninsula. Aside from the forces in Japan, Guam,

and Thailand and forces apportioned to the theater Combatant Commander, these wings are key to the current U.S. defense of the peninsula. Certainly they represent the teeth of U.S. combat capability immediately available at the onset of hostilities. Under the Air Force expeditionary force concept, the expected capability is a two wings force in the objective area within 24 hours. Still, I believe withdrawing these wings completely from the region would be drastic in terms of signaling our intentions and retaining a credible presence in the region. The U.S. should pursue an agreement with Japan to relocate these forces to Japan. Admittedly this is course of action has its challenges, primarily due to the objections previously discussed. However, I think the objections could be overcome by trading off the return of ground forces for retaining the air assets in theater and through skillful negotiations with the Korean and Japanese governments. Again, to reduce turmoil and help alleviate objections, the transition should be conducted incrementally over a span of two or more years.

Within five years after reunification, all U.S. forces would be withdrawn from the Korean peninsula. The anticipated end state is that all U.S. ground forces relocate to CONUS with a brigade sets of prepositioned equipment in theater and the U.S. Air Force wings relocate to Japan or else Guam or Thailand. This timeline assumes a stable post reunification environment and a permissive political situation that allows a gradual withdrawal. Unfortunately, failure to plan and start early preparation for a withdrawal, combined with the domestic and regional pressures previously mentioned, may result in a rather hasty removal of U.S. forces. A hasty withdrawal that is not conduct on U.S. terms would undoubtedly impair U.S. influence in the region and jeopardize national interests.

Summary and Implications

The U.S. has a vital role in shaping and maintaining the security environment in Asia Pacific both now and after Korea reunifies. After reunification, the U.S. will continue to have national strategic interests in the region and will maintain a viable military presence to protect those interests. However, the absence of a looming threat from North Korea combined with pressure from regional actors as well as domestic pressure in both the U.S. and Korea, withdrawal of U.S. forces from the peninsula appears inevitable. Increased U.S. naval presence in and around the peninsula, U.S. forces in Japan, Thailand ,and Guam, and prepositioned equipment will constitute the bulk of future U.S. presence in the region. The U.S. must develop a more creative and capable strategy of protecting its vital interests and achieving its national objectives. This strategy includes a heavier reliance on the diplomatic, informational, and economic instruments of power. Since regional powers have placed great emphasis on

economic growth and sustainment, the U.S. can assist and encourage cooperation toward achieving these mutual goals. Historical and cultural animosities between China, Japan, and Korea provide significant challenges to maintaining a delicate balance. However, as the world leader in military and economic might, technologies, and information, the U.S. is uniquely positioned to engage these nations and mediate between competing interests. As the countries of Asia Pacific open their markets to trade and become more economically interdependent, they will share a mutual interest in regional security. Collective security and economic forums like WTO, ARF, and CSCAP will institutionalize multilateral security cooperation in the region. Comprehensive engagement to include a continued U.S. military presence combined with regional collective security and economic cooperation will provide regional stability to Asia Pacific and ensure the future of a unified Korea.

Finally, this study has significant implications for strategic planners. Strengthened diplomatic ties, increased economic cooperation and military stationing alternatives take time. Efforts to shape the strategic environment must begin now and continue with uninterrupted determination. Once reunification occurs events will move rapidly, as they did in Europe, and the opportunity to significantly shape events is lost or determined in a way contrary to U.S. interests.

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